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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001485

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2015

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: ALL IN THE FAMILY: SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT APPOINTS  
YOUNGER BROTHER FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: A. COLOMBO 1417

[B](#). COLOMBO 1446

[C](#). COLOMBO 1354

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.4 (B,D  
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SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) On August 22 President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed Anura Bandaranaike, her younger brother and Minister of Tourism, Foreign Minister. The move is viewed largely as a consolation prize for Bandaranaike after he failed to gain his party's--and his sister's--approval as the next presidential candidate. Although well traveled and cosmopolitan, Bandaranaike has neither the broad-based, charismatic political appeal of his sister nor the intellectualism and international experience of his predecessor Lakshman Kadirgamar. Family ties notwithstanding, it is unlikely that Bandaranaike will enjoy the same level of confidence that Kumaratunga had in his predecessor. The possibility of impending presidential and/or general elections suggests that Bandaranaike may not hold his new post for long. End summary.

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HAVE MINISTRY, WILL TRAVEL

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[1](#)2. (C) On August 22 President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed her younger brother Anura Bandaranaike Foreign Minister, a post left vacant by the August 12 assassination of elder statesman and presidential confidant Lakshman Kadirgamar (Ref A). While Bandaranaike will remain as Tourism Minister, his accompanying portfolios of Industries and Investment Promotion were reassigned to Finance Minister Dr. Sarath Amunugama. Bandaranaike is expected to accompany his sister when she leaves on an official visit to China on August 26. The appointment followed widespread speculation that Bandaranaike, disappointed in his bid to gain his sister's endorsement as the next Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) presidential candidate (Ref C), would receive this plum post as a consolation prize, despite his comparative lack of experience in the field. The possibility that presidential elections (and perhaps general elections as well) may be held before the end of the year (Ref B) suggests that Bandaranaike may not encumber his new post for long. (Some local wags have quipped that his well-known predilection for foreign travel is his strongest qualification for the job. When asked what he thought of Bandaranaike's appointment, the head of a prominent local think tank replied, "Well, he's always wanted the job.")

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FAMILY MATTERS

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[1](#)3. (C) That said, Bandaranaike has "always wanted" and never obtained several positions--Prime Minister, President, SLFP leader--that he believes are his birthright. As the male heir to the Bandaranaike dynasty, the new Foreign Minister has the rare distinction of having both parents (father S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike from 1956 until his assassination in 1959 and mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike from 1960-65, 1970-77 and 1994-2000) and a sister (briefly in 1994) serve as Prime Ministers and leaders of the SLFP. When it became apparent that his mother was bypassing him for the party leadership (and thus, as SLFP presidential candidate) in favor of his older sister Chandrika in 1993, Anura left the party his father founded, crossing the aisle to become a member of the opposition United National Party (UNP). He returned to the party in 2001, netting the Tourism Ministry after the SLFP victory in general elections in April 2004. As an architect of the short-lived alliance between the SLFP and the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and a JVP "booster" within the Cabinet, Bandaranaike has sometimes found himself at odds with his sister over the past year as relations between the coalition partners frayed. (In general, he is reported to be closer to elder sister Sunethra.) There is some speculation that, given Bandaranaike's aisle-crossing past and the prospect of impending elections, the Foreign Ministry

portfolio may have been offered to keep him in the party fold after he was passed up as SLFP presidential candidate yet again--this time by his sister--on August 1 (Ref C).

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POLITICS IN THE BLOOD  
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14. (SBU) Bandaranaike was born on February 15, 1949. He was educated at Royal College in Colombo (compulsory entrance examinations to this competitive institution were suspended the year academic underachiever Bandaranaike applied, only to be re-instituted the following year), graduating in 1966. Among his classmates was Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Prime Minister and current Leader of the Opposition. Bandaranaike received a B.A. in Western History from the University of London in 1973. Upon his return from the UK, his mother anointed him head of the SLFP Youth League and a member of the party central committee.

15. (SBU) Bandaranaike, who has served in Parliament continuously since 1977, has enjoyed a longer career in politics than his more famous sister, who only entered national-level politics in 1994. He was first elected to Parliament in 1977, winning one of only eight SLFP seats that year, and became Leader of the Opposition in 1983 after his mother, upon being expelled from Parliament by the then-UNP government, lost that position. In 1989 he was re-elected to Parliament. After losing out to sister Chandrika as his mother's chosen successor, he was rewarded for crossing over to the UNP in 1993 with the post of Minister of Higher Education, re-entering Parliament as a national list (or appointed) UNP MP the following year. Following his election to Parliament on the UNP ticket in 2000, he was unanimously elected Speaker--and promptly switched his party affiliation back to SLFP. The SLFP's victory at general elections in April 2004 brought him out of the opposition and into the Cabinet as Minister of Tourism, Industries and Investment Promotion. The President's August 1 announcement put to rest rampant speculation (some of it fueled by Bandaranaike himself) as to which SLFP stalwart--Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse or little brother Anura--would secure Kumaratunga's blessing to succeed her as President. Nonetheless, Kumaratunga signaled her intention to keep the family in politics and politics in the family with her designation of Anura as SLFP candidate for Prime Minister in upcoming elections (Ref C).

16. (C) Bandaranaike has turned in an unimpressive performance as Tourism Minister, however, especially in the aftermath of the December 26 tsunami, which exacted an estimated USD 58 million in recovery costs on the devastated industry. On vacation in Canada at the time of the tragedy, Bandaranaike was criticized for failing to return to his stricken homeland expeditiously, instead extending his holiday for another 12 days. Once back in Sri Lanka, he was quoted widely in the local press as describing his sister's decision to ban post-tsunami reconstruction within 100 meters of the coastline as "stupid." Following that incident, Bandaranaike reported to POL FSN, the President told her younger brother to "keep quiet," and selected trusted civil servants instead for high-profile roles in post-tsunami planning and reconstruction.

17. (C) Director General of Commerce K.N. Weerasinghe (please protect), commenting on his experiences with Bandaranaike in his capacity as Investment Promotion Minister, described him as a charming "self-promoter," who has no scruples about claiming credit for the (successful) efforts of others. For example, when the Minister accompanied Weerasinghe to Brussels for GSP negotiations, Bandaranaike played little substantive role in aiding the GSL effort. When the negotiations proved fruitful, however, Bandaranaike, upon his return, released posters and advertisements congratulating himself for a job well done. Weerasinghe also characterized his former boss as forgetful, unable to remember basic points, even if given them repeatedly.

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HEALTH PROBLEMS?  
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18. (C) A diabetic, Bandaranaike has extreme difficulty in walking. (At a recent wreath-laying ceremony in Colombo, he proved nearly unable to climb the four steps to the monument.) An earlier drinking problem, however, is now reported to be under control, and some say he has recently slimmed down as he has "gotten serious" about his political future. The Foreign Minister is an avid movie fan, who enjoys frequent "film watching" trips to California and swapping film trivia with interlocutors. A Sinhala Buddhist, he is unmarried. He speaks excellent English.

ENTWISTLE